

My name is Saree Haley Kaminsky and it's April 11, 1995, I'm conducting an interview with Kate Barany in Chicago in English

What is your name?

Kate Barany

When were you born?

April 29, 1929

And how old are you now?

66

What was your name at birth?

Kate Foti

Where were you born?

Bakescsaba, in Hungary

And where was that, was that a suburb, a small town?

It was a small town in Hungary

Who was in your immediate family?

My father, my mother, and my brother

What was your father's name?

Dr. Michael Foti

What kind of a doctor was he?

He was a radiologist

And your mother's name?

Adele Weiss

Did your mother have an occupation?

She was a radiologist too, but, not, without a MD, she was really an assistant

And you had brothers, sisters?

One brother, his name was George Foti.

Was he younger or older than you?

4 years older

Where did you go to school?

Elementary school in Bakescsaba and the so-called gymnasium also in Bakescsaba. I started but then it was interrupted when the Germans came to Hungary. And after the war I finished high school in Budapest.

What was the Jewish community like when you were growing up?

Was there an active Jewish community in your town?

It was an active, yes it was active.

What about your family, was it a religious family?

It was religious, but not super religious.

Did you go to synagogue?

On the high holy days, but not regularly, not on every Saturday or so.

What do you remember about your daily life when you were growing up, you went to school and then you came home?

It depends from which year you want... start before the war or...

Before the war.

As it was the so-called (numerous clauses) in the gymnasium, that means there was just a certain number of Jews who were accepted in that gymnasium and I was one of the privileged due to the dedication of my father and the connections, so I was accepted. In the morning I went to the school, and I was a good student and I liked learning. I hated the so-called intermission because I was the only Jew and I was separated from the others and

Physically separated?

Yes, you know when the other girls, this was a girls school, played together or gossiped together, they did not include me, I was standing separate.

Did you understand why?

Sure, it was made very clear that you are the dirty Jew or something like that.

Did you know why they thought you were bad? Why did they call you a dirty Jew?

Because you were born Jew. You were not born right, you were born wrong.

And then, what were the first signs of anti-semitism? When you were forced to stop school?

No, this was already in the school.

There is one episode which stands out in my mind that in the class where we were there were tables for 2 students. Luckily we were an odd number, so I was the one, so one person had to be a single person, to have a table of 2, but only one person is sitting there, but what happened then there was a newcomer who was the daughter of a soldier from the army, at the higher rank and though there was an extra seat empty next to me, they could not put such a person, such a girl next to a Jew, so they took me and placed me to the girl who was the worst student in the class, her name was Zita, I remember, it turned out that her partner was taken away and I was put next to her, she started to cry. And I was so stupid, that I started to talk to her, "Don't cry, I will help you, you can copy the test from my test" and so on and that she did.

Very soon, we had a test in mathematics, and she copied things from my test paper and we got the papers back. She got an A and I got like a B, though she copied things from me and then I went to the teacher and said, "How come, that she got an A and I got a B?" I did not do anything wrong. We had to draw a triangle with equal angles, and then she said, "oh this angle is not good." which was really ridiculous. For the other answers she could not say anything, everything was correct, so she just made it up, she had to find an excuse, "oh look this angle is not..."

About how old were you then?

14 years old, and that was the first time when it really hurt, the injustice.

How many more years did you go to school before you were stopped?

The Germans came into Hungary in April, 1944. In April I had my 15th year birthday, that I still spent there and very soon afterwards, we first went to hiding and then we were caught and first put in prison and then we went to Auschwitz.

Let me back up a little up.

What do you remember of growing up?

Was your mother a good cook?

Oh, my mother was a great cook. We had a very nice family life. I had grandparents living close, lots of uncles and aunts, lots of cousins, later on I may show you pictures. My mother was a very intelligent person and my father was also very intelligent and well educated person.

There was music in the house, as a matter of fact I not only played the piano, but my aim was to become a pianist, and I practiced the piano every day for many, many hours, and I had a regular teacher from my home town and then I had a special teacher, Yvonne Engel, from Budapest, who was a famous concert pianist in those days.

So you had music in the home, did you go to the theater?

Yes, not that much, because I was still very young.

But whenever we went to Budapest, we went to the opera, and also in Bakescsaba there were groups who came and visited and performed. I remember Marcel Marceau, his performances, there were also folk dances.

And there were various cultural activities we took advantage of all of those.

Did you and your brother play together?

Yes, we played jazz and my brother was very good in mathematics and so was I, and we did lots of mathematical puzzles.

Did you have any pets in the home?

No.

So, now it's April of 1944, and you said the Germans came.

Correct

Were you forced out of your house?

No, because my father was an eminent physician, he was the physician of the Burgermeister, the mayor, and while our relatives were taken to the ghetto we were allowed to stay in our own home. We did wear yellow stars but we stayed in our home.

Now, you were not allowed to continue in school?

For a few days, I believe yes, but then we went to hiding and of course not, we did not...

You were allowed to stay in your house, why did you go into hiding?

Because we got the warning that they don't know how long they can keep our house as a safe house.

Where did you hide?

At the house of a patient of my father in a suburb of Bakescsaba.

How long were you in hiding?

It was a short time, first I was just in hiding because they took me there. It was like a farmhouse and I was hiding behind straw and then later on my mother joined me but then they were afraid, because in the radio they were always announcing that those who are hiding Jews will be punished severely, so they asked us to leave.

And my father got falsified papers for us and we were supposed to go to Budapest but on the way, we were caught and taken to prison, and then from that prison, we were taken to a prison in Budapest to that prison also my father was taken. Up until that point, my father was free and working as a medical doctor.

Your father was freed from prison?

No, previously he was free, he was not taken to the ghetto.

You, your mother, and your brother?

No, my family, that means my grandparents, great grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, they were taken to the ghetto.

My brother was taken to the so-called working camp, that means, this belonged to the army, but not the regular army, but they were taken to do hard work in a camp-like place. They had a special word for this, it was called in Hungarian, Munkatábor, munka means work and tábor means camp

So now as far as prison, your mother was with you in prison?

Right my mother and I were in prison together, when we were leaving Bakescsaba with the falsified papers to Budapest. My name on the falsified papers was Kate Ferency

How long were you in this prison?

I don't remember exactly, not very long...

And then we were put in a wagon, in a closed wagon about 80 – 100 people in the same wagon, it was closed, it had a little window, but the window had irons on it They put one pail in for waste products and it was smelly and people were hysterical, and we did not know where we were being taken but everybody knew that this was not good. And this went on for days and I remember one person died and then that person was covered by some clothes.

From time to time, but that was not frequently, they opened the wagon door and we were allowed to take, somebody was chosen to take out, to empty the pail and the pail was brought back. As far as food was concerned, I don't remember, we got some water, but, I don't remember how long it took...but it felt that it took ages.

I also remember some people were talking, "let's escape, how can we escape?", but there was absolutely no way to escape so there was just such a small window with this iron and the wagon door was from outside closed and there was no way to escape, so nobody escaped.

Were you able to take anything with you on this trip?

Did you have any suitcase?

We had some suitcase, the same suitcase we had in prison, but of course when we arrived in Auschwitz, we had to leave everything there.

My mother and I were in one wagon and my father was in another wagon

And when we arrived to Auschwitz we said, "oh, how good to get out of the wagon", we did not know where we would go. And there was an announcement, children under 16 and pregnant women and women who are over 50, go to the left and the others go to the right and there was an explanation, that the people who go to the left will have an easier life while the people who go to the right will have to work.

And my mother who was always a very honest straightforward woman told me that I should go to the left. I did not want, though I was always a very obedient daughter. But then I did go to the left, but then suddenly, I became so panicky and just instinctively I wanted to run back to my mother and I very carefully left that group and inched my way back to the other group but I could not find my mother, but I knew, I went in the same direction where most of the people were going and I just joined them in the hope that sooner or later I would find my mother and then we were taken to the so-called shower rooms; we had to undress and they took my glasses away. That made me feeling very uncomfortable and they cut off the hair and then after the shower we got some other clothes, but just one clothes, we did not get pants or shoes, we were barefooted. We did not have prison clothes, at that time, there were times when people had prison clothes, but I did not have any prison clothes, so I just got a piece of clothes and that was it.

And then, we were taken, I remember, in the so-called Vernichtungslager C

...Vernichtung means extermination, lager means camp and C was the number.

There were lots of barracks standing one next to the other, and I was taken into one of these barracks and there I met some Hungarian people and they said that they were there already a few days earlier and they said that yes, today new people from Hungary were taken to another barrack. I tried to sneak out and look in another barrack and actually it turned out that I was in the same barrack where my mother was but I did not recognize her, so, she looked so different.

Did she recognize you?

At that point, she did not know I was looking for her. I don't know whether, you know, in Auschwitz every morning, early morning and late in the afternoon, there was always the so-called Zählappell, Zähl means count, Appell that we're in rows of tens, we were just numbers and that was also the time when we got some food or something to drink. We were in a row and the first person got a pot of coffee, then drank from it and gave to the next and so on and so on. I don't remember everything exactly, but from the very beginning, we were always being hungry.

In the Zählappell they always wanted a certain number of people in one group and then, if there were more, those people were taken to another group and so on.

So, this went on for a couple of days I was looking for my mother. And then, in the meantime, I did meet Hungarians and they said, oh, they saw my mother and they were looking also for my mother and then they took me to my mother and of course you can imagine how happy we were that my mother and I were reunited.

And right after this reunion, followed the Zählappell, and in the Zählappell, the number was not ok, there was one more person, and then the Häftling, they were people who were in charge of the Zählappell and then also, of course a German person came and controlled it or checked things out, and announced that, "who came here?" so my mother said you have to tell them and I said, "I will not tell" and I just stay there.

And they took someone from the end of the line, and moved them out.

But this was a common thing that the Zählappell did not add up, right, and during the Zählappell, there was also the time when we had to be naked, they took some of us to work and some of us to the gas chamber.

It was not said that who was going to the gas chamber and who was going to work, but it was clear. We did not want to believe it, but we knew it.

Had you heard about Auschwitz before you got there?

No

So, you didn't know anything about what type of a camp it was?

No, but when they said this is Vernichtungslager C, I knew German.

I did not talk much about my pre-war year, but I should maybe mention here that the reason why I spoke German and I could read and write in German was because we were well-to-do people and it was customary that well-to-do people had a Hungarian cook and a German Fraulein and we had a German Fraulein who taught us German so we spoke fluently German.

1995, Tape 2:

Dr. Barany, you said you had a German Fraulein when you were growing up.

Yes.

What was it like? What did you learn if anything from her?

First of all, we learned to speak and write German and we were introduced to the German literature, and Stefan Zweig and Thomas Mann. Though I was young, but still we already read German poetry. The beautiful memories of what I have is this Fraulein is that they taught us to be always neat and clean and on time and well organized and I am still very well organized. Not long ago I got an award the best organized teacher at the university and I think I can thank this Fraulein. And we had Frauleins, I don't remember exactly until which year, but then we grew up and we were older and it was a natural ending, so the Frauleins went back to Germany.

So, the Fraulein was like a governess or a child's nursemaid?

Right, right and that I learned German and spoke fluently German saved my time I don't know whether I could tell you this thing right now...
When we had the so-called Zählappell, there were times when we were naked and there was this selection, some of us were sent to work and others were sent to the gas chamber and my mother used to say that I should go first and she would come right after me. If I will be sent to the gas chamber, then she will just look like old and wants to follow me that we should be together but if I am sent to work, then she will straighten out, that she should also go to work, we should go together. And we followed this policy; we survived many of these so-called Zählappell. And I always straightened out because I wanted to live and I wanted to go to work.

And you and your mother were in the same barracks?

From this time on, when I found her, then we were.
I can talk about the barracks later on, but let me finish this line of thought.

In the fall, of course we did not have a calendar and we did not have a watch, so we did not know the date and time but you noticed it was fall. There was a Zählappell, when Mengele was doing it and this was pretty much close to the time when Auschwitz, when they evacuated already people from Auschwitz, so I was, we were naked and I was sent to the group which was supposed to go to the gas chamber.
It was not said, but you knew it, instinctively, so I just ran, as I was naked to Mengele, who was a tall, handsome man and I told him in German that I am so young, I want to live and I want to work and I am really strong.
He had a stick in his hand and hit me on the gluteus, and I ran he said something probably "ge", go, and as I ran to the group which I was sure who was taken to work and as I run to reach that group and I stopped and looked back and I never saw my mother again so I have absolutely no idea what happened with my mother and I for a long time I was suffering that maybe my mother thought I am going to the gas chamber and this took away her will to live, and so she just gave up, I don't know.

I spoke with a few people who survived Auschwitz and nobody ever heard about her, and then so I have no idea what happened to her, so, it is most likely that she was taken to the gas chamber in Auschwitz.

You mentioned Mengele, were you aware of any of his experiments?

No, absolutely not, and it's good that we did not know anything about it.

No, you have to remember I was a 15 year old child who believed in the goodness of people and always assumed that people are here to help you and of course you knew that there is a terrible war going on, but that is a global thing but the individual people are good, so

Did you still keep that thought throughout the war?

I still try, sometimes it is not easy to hold onto this thought, but I am always looking for the good in everybody.

Did you ever think back what your German governess was doing at this point?

Not really, no.

I really say I have many chapters in my life, and one is called before Auschwitz and then are the years in the concentration camp and then the year afterwards and then when I met my husband and started a new life.

So, my husband sometimes teases me that I am not 66 years old, just 46 years old, because the first 20 years before I met him don't count, so, but really I was very lucky to find him and we have a beautiful harmonious life.

Let us go back a bit, back to the camp,

What was it like in the barracks? You said you started out, they just gave you something to wear, not a uniform?

We had something to wear, just one piece of clothes, and whenever we were taken to the showers, then we had to give these clothes away and when we came out we got another clothes, we did not have our own clothes. We did not have panties, as I mentioned, and that bothered me very much because in the barrack, we were sitting like with outstretched feet and one person in between the legs of the others and between the legs of the third one and so on. This was in the barrack where I was first and probably 10 people were in one row and that the other one next to it. In that barrack, we could not lay down. Later on, there were barracks where we were laying down and we were like spoons, one body next to the other one and at one time everybody had to turn over to the other side when we were sleeping at night, but in this barrack there was not even that much place to sleep. We were just sitting on the floor, which was cold and it was very annoying, but you had to urinate and I was ashamed and so on, but there was nothing that I could do. Now usually we were taken to the so-called toilet, which were really trenches before the Zählappell, I think we were taken twice a day, but I don't remember exactly, but, you know, you could not go to the toilet whenever you wanted, this was something which

bothered me a lot. Of course if somebody had diarrhea and something like this, then they were gassed, they were taken away and if somebody was sick, and reported that the person was sick, we knew, we were not told, but instinctively we knew that they were taken to the gas chamber.

So the barracks were standing next to each other and the whole lager, one whole part of the lager, like this so-called Vernichtungslager C was surrounded by wires which had electricity, I distinctly remember one person once touched the wire and fell back right away and died. This, this was...

Did you make any friends in the barracks? Were there any girls your age?

There were a few, not many, I was the among the youngest...because as mentioned to you even I was not supposed to be there as I was supposed to go to the left side when we arrived and there were just very few people who were at my age.

Did the older women tend to mother you?

I was with my mother and my mother mothered.

But then, after your mother, when your mother was gone?

Then I was in the working camp, I was sent to the working camp.

What kind of work?

I only know what I did, what our group did. This was not a large camp, but we had still several barracks and they were round barracks. And here we were laying at night on wood and we got something to cover ourselves and at this point, in this camp we got wooden shoes. In Auschwitz we were still barefooted.

What was the name of this work camp?

This work camp was called Birnbaumer. I recently called up here the librarian where I asked the librarian to look up whether they had anything on Birnbaumer, but he could not find. Baum means tree and there were lots of trees around there and I did not see who were the people who cut down the trees. Our job was to carry the trees from one place to another and always three people were carrying one tree and the two people with whom I was in the same group always let me to be in the middle which was the easiest, so if you call this mothering, yes, I can say, they did mother me. They were very nice to me.

Did you take the trees to a train station?

I don't know. The only thing is that we had to carry. It was a very difficult job all day long until early morning until it got dark, we were carrying the trees from one place to the other, then we went back, we had to go fast to go back because we were supposed to carry as many trees as we could, but I don't really remember how many times we did

those trips. We had no idea why we had to carry those trees, that was our job, and that was our job. And then we did not get much food, as I mentioned before.

What kind of food?

In the morning we got some coffee, which was not real coffee, but it looked like colored water. In the evenings, we got some hot meal, and sometimes we got bread and margarine. It was usually the same thing.

Was there any meat or vegetables?

No, no meat. The hot meal was like a vegetable, I don't really know how to say this in English, I never ate it here in America.

What's the word in Hungarian or German?

Actually, I never knew about this, I heard it said. Cukorrépa, Cukor means sugar and répa means carrot. I don't know if this makes sense to you or not. It was always the same. So, but I got thinner and thinner. After a while I just got sick with a cold and sore throat. And there was one barrack which was called the hospital...this was already in the working camp, so there was no extermination, like in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, if you got sick, you were taken to the gas chamber. Here there was no gas chamber and the hospital had a very nice female physician. And unfortunately I forgot the name, but I do see in front of me her personality. She was a very loving older physician, approximately the same age of my mother and she heard about my father. I mentioned to you my father was a very distinguished medical doctor. He wrote a book and at the University, they taught from his book and he was also often invited to give on the radio some semi-popular lectures, so his name was well known and so this person heard about my father and she took me under her wing and helped me as much as she could.

Was she a German doctor?

No, she was a Jewish. She came from Czechoslovakia. She was also a prisoner, right. I don't whether you have heard about this that the system was basically people who were prisoner for a longer time were in charge for the later prisoners. There was a system like this. Those people had the numbers, with 2 numbers.

We, when we arrived in this working camp, we got a chain in our neck and there was a number I remembered this number for a long, long time and then suddenly I forgot the number, I have no idea what was my number, I don't even remember how many digits, I assume there must have been 4 digits.

So, now you worked all day and then went back to the barracks at night?

Right, then we had something to eat and we went to sleep.

What were thoughts? Did you think you might die from your weakened state?

We were most hysterical at spring time, one day they evacuated this working camp; we heard already that there are gunfire and you could hear airplanes moving. We knew the war is going on and the war is going on in our neighborhood, close to us and we overheard, as the direction was given to the German guards, that they should evacuate that the people should all line up and they should march, I don't know where, and it was said that the people who were in the hospital should be shot. I did get up, and tried to join the people who would be evacuated, but I collapsed, and they took me back to the hospital, and so we knew that we would be killed

And at this point, we had to dig a trench for ourselves, our grave, we were not many people, I don't remember exactly, but like 20 people and we knew what was waiting for us and we were just screaming and screaming and the people who could walk, they were evacuated and we dugged our grave and we were in this hospital barrack and then we looked out and we saw that the guard is leaving and Russian partisans came in and we were liberated. And we were staying, then, in this barrack for a couple of days

We went into the houses where the Germans lived, the guards took all the food that we found and ate.

And then after a few days, somebody from the Russian army came and we were taken to Trachtenberg where we were put up in a house and later on, I don't remember the exact timing, we were taken east and we were put in a camp that means, it was surrounded by wire and we were not allowed to leave or come and to my great shock in this camp, they were Hungarians who were Fascists who left Hungary together with the Germans to escape the Russians because then Russians were already marching in Hungary. So, here Jews and Fascists were put together. It was really shocking for us.

Let me go back a little bit.

Please

Going back to the barracks, going back to the work camp, either at Auschwitz or the work camp, what do you remember about the guards? Was there any mistreatment directly to you?

In Auschwitz, the Zählappells were first done by former prisoners, and then a German came to check it out, and I distinctly remember, this was a German woman. I don't remember, I did not know her name but she had red hair and she was always with a large big dog and I was very much afraid of that dog. We were just counted, the rows were counted and if there were more rows than there was supposed to be or there was a row not with the full 10 number, those people were taken to another barrack.

So, my mother and I were always very careful to be somewhere in the middle so we should not be taken and we should be always in the same row, I was in front of her and she was behind me.

The life was around the Zählappell. Before Zählappell we could go to the toilet and then there was the Zählappell for a long, long time, whether it was raining or the sun was shining, the Zählappell was the Zählappell.

And then we got some food and that was the most important thing for us and that was twice a day, as I remember, and in between we were just sitting in the barracks and at night we were sleeping and as mentioned at the beginning, we were sleeping in this sitting position, the first person who was by the wall was touching the wall and the others were just in the lap of the previous one and one after the other.

Did you see any beatings by the guards?

No, I did not see any beatings by the guards.
I saw once a death when one person wanted to talk to somebody in the next lager, lager is camp, but I don't know accidentally, how it happened, accidentally probably, she touched the wire and she fell back right away.

Were there times, either at Auschwitz or later, did you wonder if God still existed?

We did not think anything.

Did you pray at all to be out of there, to be saved?

I think so, in Auschwitz, but later on, we did not...
We were exhausted, we did not have any thoughts. We worked and worked and worked and we had no thoughts.

One more question, you had mentioned about growing up with music.

Did you sing in the camp, did you try and let music soothe you?

No, no, it would have been a good idea...but it was not and as mentioned to you we were always afraid. It was not said that those are the gas chambers but you knew and you did not want to think about it that you might end up there, all your thoughts were surrounding that survive the Zählappell, survive the selection, and be sent to work.

...by the Russian partisans, you had been in the hospital at the time of liberation?

Yes.

Do you remember about how much you weighed back then?

Not really, but I was very skinny, just bones and skin.

And when they liberated you, did you feel now I'm safe?

First, yes when we were taken to a lager, as I mentioned to you, first we were taken to a lager, a camp, next to Lublin, and then from there on, we were taken to a camp which was near Minsk, in the former Soviet Union and again, there, were all kinds of people, not only Holocaust survivors, but all kinds of political prisoners, there were Greeks and Italians and then there were lots of Hungarian Fascists and also German Nazis who were caught. So, it was really a mix of people and you were very very (?) especially after the war was over, that what will happen. We had a desire to go back to Hungary, what we still called our homeland, and we did not see how will this happen. When we were in this camp near Minsk, there were Hungarian communists who were escaped from Hungary and lived in Russia and they had connections and they brought this problem up that is not right to put us together with the Fascists and the Nazis. Then, these people, I remember, especially one person who was the leader, he fought for us that we should be then taken back to Hungary.

In this place, I was a very lucky person. Again, this Hungarian person arranged that I was put in the kitchen and as you know, in hard times, the kitchen is the best place to be, and I washed the dishes, that was my job. Of course there was no running water, or hot or cold water, there was no detergent as we are used to having here, dishwasher. There was just cold water that we had to bring from the well and then we got some sand and we cleaned the dishes with sand. That was very lucky that I was working in the kitchen. And my second luck was that the medical doctor heard that I was the daughter of a famous medical doctor and there was a house where the medical doctor lived, the pharmacist lived, where these special people lived, then I was taken out of the camp and I lived also there. I was very privileged. I think that helped me to survive. You know many people died in this camp too, because of sickness or malnutrition. So, in this way I was recovering.

The Hungarian who rescued you and took you into the kitchen, was it a man or a woman?

It was a man.

Do you remember his name?

No.

A young man, an old man?

I think he was middle aged, the only thing I remember he had a moustache. So, but, there was, it was purely humanitarian. Because in other things, there were rapes and things like that. I remember, for example, one episode, when we were carried in the wagons from one place to the other and a night it stopped and at that time, wagon doors were open, and then men came in. In this wagon there were only women.

This was after the war, after the so-called first liberation.
In Auschwitz or in the working camp where I was there were only females.

In the camp which was next to Lublin or in the camp which was next to Minsk there were men and women. Though I did not know much about sex at that time, but still I knew that this was a violent act that was going on there.

I clearly remember one man came toward me and grabbed my clothes and I kicked him at the most sensitive places so much. We were shouting and screaming and then there were wagons where there were men and they came to rescue us.

But the ones who were intent on rape, were those were fellow prisoners or the guards?

I don't really know, I really don't know. I don't want to go in...But I know it was fellow prisoners who came to our rescue.

When you say wagons, do you mean trains?

Trains, in which they carry animals. You can see that here too.

What was the first food you remember after the war when you were working in the kitchens?

I don't remember, it was some hot food, I don't remember the taste, I don't remember what it was, but food is food and food is most important.

Ever since I, people ask me what are my three wishes.

To be healthy, together with my family and then not to be hungry and not to be cold.

What did you do in the Dr. 's house?

We went there just to sleep.

So, you worked in the kitchens for about how long?

From morning to evening

How many weeks, months?

Everyday throughout our whole stay until we were taken back to Hungary.

When was that?

Again, I don't know the exact dates, but it was late summer of 1945

So, we're talking a few months after liberation?

Right, but I don't remember exactly. The only thing I remember from the way back from this camp from Minsk toward Hungary, that we stopped in Arad. Arad is a city which belonged at that time to Romania, but previously it belonged to Hungary.

And I had relatives there and as a matter of fact, when we showed the picture, this post card was sent to that place, so when the wagon stopped there I mentioned that I have relatives there and this relative was also a medical doctor and they called him and he came out to the wagon and brought me some food, that I remember, it was food, real bread and I ate it and it was just wonderful to have a relative.

And then I think he wrote to Budapest to our relatives who remained in Budapest that I am on my way to Budapest.

Now, this was the first relative that you had seen after the war, what about your family, what about your father, your brother?

No, I had no connection with them whatsoever.

I saw my father for the last time in Auschwitz. Now in Auschwitz, let me mention to you, he was working again as a medical doctor and as a medical doctor he got us scissors and he was able to get us the scissors and this was such a wonderful thing, we could cut our nails with the scissors. And then maybe this is not right, but it happened that we gave our scissors to others to cut their fingernails for a little bread. But that was the way of life in that place, so this scissor was wonderful.

So, I saw my father a few times in Auschwitz, of course, not vis à vis as I see you now, but through wires which had electricity, and I knew I could not touch this wire or I'd be executed right away.

When did you see him after the war?

When I arrived in Budapest.

Did you know he was alive, that you would see him in Budapest?

This relative whom I met in Arad told me that he will get in contact with my father and my brother. He said also my father and my brother are alive.

What about your grandparents, your great grandparents?

Alright, it's a very touching thing, my great Grandmother, we called her (Muttinko) and I will show a picture of her. She was born during the revolution of 1848 in a shelter and she was 96 years old when she stepped off from the wagon in Auschwitz and she was then of course...

Was that then the last you saw of her?

I saw her, I was not in the same wagon as she was.

And others in your family after the war?

Most of the people were gassed. I had lots of aunts and lots of cousins, none of my cousins survived, actually one cousin, a male cousin survived and my brother. Since we are talking about survival, as mentioned, I came from a small town, and a number of girls of my age, three of us returned to Bakescsaba after the war, these three were then quite good friends. All three of us wanted to leave Bakescsaba because that is where the bad memories started and we went to Budapest, which, in our eyes, was the more liberal city and we went to Budapest and all three of us studied there science. Judith was of my age and the third one, Agnes, was one year older. We were the three youngest survivors. Both Agnes and Judith could not cope with life, that their families were killed and they both committed suicide.

Judith lived with an older relative who lived in Budapest. I don't know whether you know they took the Jews from everywhere in Hungary, but not from Budapest, they did not get that, so the Jews in Budapest survived and this older relative of Judith's took her in and Judith lived there and one day I got the message that she gassed herself. She left a note, my parents were gassed and people whom I loved were gassed and I just can not live without them. I will gas myself. And when the aunt came home, she turned off the gas, but she was already dead.

Did you ever have feelings like that, that you might want to kill yourself?

Probably yes, but I tried to get rid of such thoughts; I tried to be an optimist. It was very, very difficult after the war to live and I studied a lot. I read a lot and read a lot of philosophical works and I also prepared a scrap book in which I wrote 5 things from famous people, like carpe diem, that is from latin, catch the day I always thought just concentrate on this day and think of the good ones, think what good you can do. And I also remember I pressed some flowers and mounted them in this scrapbook; I had this scrapbook for a long time.

Did you live with your father then?

No, this is a different story. My father met a young girl and married her. And at that time, I resented this very much. I did not understand, remember, I was at that time, still only 16 years old. So, my brother and I left my father and we lived together. While we lived together, all, my father, his young wife, the mother of the wife, but it just was impossible. I was very inamicable. I did not like them and I made my father's life miserable and his new wife made his life miserable, and, so we, my brother and I, moved out, and we had no contact with my father whatsoever.

But my father had a younger brother, who was also a survivor, and he was in this so-called working camp in which my brother was also. I understand that my father always asked about me through him and he often invited us for lunch and gave me food because that was, food was still our main concern and when I told him that I'm getting married, by the way, I said I can marry only a Holocaust survivor, that I would not be able to live

my life with anybody else, just a Holocaust survivor, because only another survivor could feel what I went through and could understand me.

Let me go back a bit, you're living with your brother, was he working then?

He was also a student.

How were you able to live?

There was an American Jewish foundation there which was called Joint

The joint distribution committee

Right, and we got support from them. Besides this, as mentioned to you, I was very good in mathematics and I was tutoring mathematics and I had the top prize. I was sought out. I had students for every day and for example, one Jewish girl, the lesson was always Friday afternoon, and after the lesson, I was always invited for the Friday dinner.

And after dinner, I washed the dishes and in the kitchen I could eat all the leftovers. I always tried to make myself useful. Whenever I was teaching, like my other student, I was teaching on Saturday from 11:30 -12:00 and then they had lunch. They invited me for the lunch and they could be sure I'd clean the dishes and wash the kitchen floor. It was not just like a hand out. I always tried to repay.

We got clothes from America from this joint distribution and I knew somebody who had a sewing machine and I sewed my clothes and in return I sewed clothes for the person who had the sewing machine. I always tried to help myself and others.

Now you finished high school?

Yes, and I went to the University and I had a so-called scholarship, which was I did not have to pay any tuition. My majors were mathematics and physics. In physics and also in the chemistry lab, the custom was, if you broke something, you had to pay for it, so I was always very careful that I never broke anything. And this was a good habit, because still today, I am still very careful in the lab.

Did you have any dreams about what you would you when you got your degree?

To work for humanity.

And things got better as the years went by after the war?

Yes.

You were still living with your brother?

Until I met my husband, then got married.

How old were you when you met your husband?

20 years old

How did you happen to meet him?

Oh, this is a very beautiful fairy tale.

This was the end of the semester and we prepared for the exams. At the university, there was a store where I also helped out whenever they needed something and in return they gave me the leftover bread and so on. One day when I was in that store there was a dried leftover bread and as I wanted to cut it into half, and as I cut it in half I cut my finger here and my finger started to bleed and I was with one of my colleagues who was majoring in chemistry. He lived in the dormitory which was supported by this joint distribution, and he said I should come up and they would put something on my finger. There were no such things as band aids like we have here. So I went up to his dorm room and then he said he was going to get iodine and some cloth and he left and another student came in and was shocked that I was there. And then I showed him my bleeding finger and he then said he was a medical student, and he will take care of me. And indeed when my colleague and friend, Aaron, came back with the iodine and cloth, my husband wiped blood and washed it with water and put iodine on it and then put this cloth over my finger and then we were talking, it was really love at first sight within minutes it turned out we that we were both Holocaust survivors and we both are students at the University and both are interested in research, and we both are very idealistic, it was just wonderful, we had this resonance immediately.

I thanked him and left and later turn out when I met Aaron, his room mate, I asked about him and it turned out that Michael asked about me.

There was a trip planned by the joint foundation for poor students and my friend was taken in the first group in the morning and I was going with the second group at noon and when I arrived there in this place where we were taken as a reward for vacation, my husband was already waiting there at the bus station and right away greeted me and took my little shabby bag and carried it and took me right away to the place where you get food, because food was very, very important for us at this time. My husband used to say said there are people who live for eating and those who eat for living. So, at that time, eating was a most important activity in my life.

You said that he was also a Holocaust survivor.

Right.

Where had he spent the war?

He was taken to Buchenwald; it is today 50 years ago that he was liberated.

How old was he when he was in the camp?

He was 8 years old at that time.

So, now you are off on this camping expedition together?

Right and that was from August 1 and every day was just great. First day when we went for a walk we were talking about theoretical physics and we had the same professor at the University, and we were talking about that professor and of course also some gossiping, University gossip. Each night there was a walk and many students walked together and then there were really highly intellectual discussions. And then on the fourth night, when again, the group went, after dinner, to such a walk, then here two people departed, there two people departed from the group and then at once we found that just my husband and I were together and all the others left and so he wanted to kiss me and I said I am not the type of girl who allows a kiss only after 4 days. And then he said that oh, he has honest intentions and so we called this our engagement and that was August 4 and ever since every year we celebrate from August 1 – 4. And actually this necklace that I have around my neck is what I got on August 1 at our 25th anniversary and his picture is inside.

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You were showing us the locket. And you said your husband gave you the locket when?

It says Love, Michael, 8-4-1974 and it was for our 25th anniversary and in the locket is his picture.

And the picture is of?

Of my husband.

Now he had said on the fourth day of your trip, he said that his intentions were honorable

And after 2 months we got married.

What was the wedding like?

It was very simple, It was in a temple, there were not many people, just a few people, it was very simple.

Was your brother there?

Of course my brother was there.

And after the wedding we were invited for lunch by the brother of my father.

Your father was not at the wedding?

No

Did he know that you had gotten married?

Yes, and I also know from my uncle that he did want to give us a wedding present but his wife did not agree with it. And he had to put aside some money from private patients and from that it took a long time he bought us a curtain for our living room for a wedding present which we got about a half year later.

I wanted to mention about my father that I am always very proud of him and respect. At that time I did not understand him, but later on with hindsight, I understand what happened and it happened with all those people who survived Auschwitz and their wife did not return. They all married a young girl, all, without any exception, I don't know one exception.

When did you make peace with your father and he with you?

As mentioned before, my uncle was the go between and he asked that we should go to my father, I went to his office in the hospital with Michael and introduced him, Michael.

And then later on the relationship improved.

When we lived in New York City, he came to visit us and he enjoyed very much at that time, we already had 2 children and he loved the grandchildren and then we went to a scientific conference in Europe and then we brought him out from Hungary.

And he was with us in Europe for a short while until we came back to the United States.

When you first married Michael, what was your home like? An apartment, a house?

It was an apartment, a one room apartment, remember it, not only we were very poor ...

You were 20 and he was 28?

We had one room, this was an apartment, a large apartment of a rich person and the apartment was divided for various people, and we had one bathroom and from this bathroom, we had bathroom and kitchen combined. The whole apartment, our part, was approximately as big as this living room. Later on, we bought an apartment, which means it was not ours, we bought it, we paid the money in order to live there, and that was before my first son was born when we moved there.

Now when you first married, you were both going to school?

Yes, and then soon we finished.

When was your first son born? How many years?

After we were already finished with school. We always planned everything very carefully. Of course, we did not plan the Hungarian revolution. And so I was pregnant with my second child.

Your first son is how old?

He was born in '55. So, he is just now 40 years old, he just had his birthday recently and we celebrated this in Minneapolis.

And your younger son is?

Was born 2 years later in '57, and I was pregnant with him when the Hungarian revolution broke out, and we left Hungary illegally. These were difficult times. We tried to leave Hungary toward Austria, but we were not successful. We always planned everything, and things fall through. For example, once it was thought that one guard, one border guard will take us over the border from Hungary to Austria. Just on the way, when he was supposed to pick us up, he was caught by the secret police, so he never came to us. Then another time it was thought that we would be hidden in a ship behind coal. And the ship goes on the Danube from Budapest to Vienna and just a few days before the ship was supposed to leave, the weather turned cold and the Danube froze and the ship did not go and so on. Then we were already really desperate and we just left with our so-called governess because I was working and I had now a governess next for George we left then toward Yugoslavia and we left Hungary through the border there. It was very difficult, I was pregnant and I was carrying George. We gave George a sleeping pill so that he should not talk or cry because they were still shooting at this border. And then after a while I told Michael I just can not carry anymore. They said that the no man's land would be right there, and it is just a short pass, but it was not a short pass it was a long, long way to no man's way. So, then I woke up George and I was carrying George by his hand, and how resilient kids are, after we arrived in Yugoslavia and we laid down, He said, (Hungarian phrase) which means we had a nice walk, so for him, this rolling down in no man's land and climbing up was fun. It was no fun for us.

Going back a bit, with the Hungarian uprising, did you feel oh , this is happening all over again? How did you feel?

Oh, that was not that bad.

You didn't feel that you were in fear of dying, of being killed?

No

Why did you decide to leave?

Because of the lack of freedom and lack of opportunities.

Now, you got to Yugoslavia, then what?

Then, next day, the Hungarians came that we should return so we got scared and wanted to leave as soon as possible. So, originally we signed up to come to America, but they said that there is a long waiting list, and so then said, but you don't have to wait whatsoever if you are willing to go to Israel, so then we signed up for Israel and we went to Israel and our youngest son was born in Israel.

How pregnant were you when you got to Israel?

We left Hungary, I don't remember the exact dates, but I think it was February 1st and in a few days we arrived in Israel, and Francis was born on April 4th. So, his birthday was also a couple of days ago.

How did you feel about landing in Israel, a Jewish homeland?

Excited and I had the intention to make a new life, but it was very difficult from a financial point of view. This was in '57, after the war there, and there was not enough food there at that time either. As you heard already, I never want to be hungry again. Besides this, while my husband already finished his studies, and he had both an MD and PhD. His PhD, he just got in the nick of time before the revolution. Actually, the revolution already broke out by the time he got the papers. But I was nowhere yet, I had a master degree, but I did not have my PhD yet. And if you want to succeed in science, you need not only knowledge, but you also need a PhD. So, in Israel it was so that I will do my PhD with Aaron Cackowski at Weizmann Institute. (Catsi) as they say in Hebrew but Cackowski is a world famous name, they were the Cackowski brothers. Cackowski was then killed in this airport attack when a bomb was thrown at the airport and later on his brother, Ephraim, became the president of Israel.

So, financially it was very difficult for us and it would have been very difficult to get my PhD there. And we got an invitation from Professor Hans Weber who was the authority in the field of muscle in which we worked. He invited both of us, my husband and me, and he said I can get my PhD there.

Where?

In Germany, so we accepted his invitation and it was for 2 years.

So, you were both studying the field of muscles?

Right., so, the agreement was we would work in Professor Weber's laboratory for two years and while I am working I would be able to finish my PhD. There were provisions made that I did not have to take classes. I only had to take exams and defend my thesis. In this way, I got my PhD in 1959.

How did you feel about going to Germany or back to Germany?

Back to Germany, I felt concerned, but on the other hand, Professor Weber had the reputation of a person who is the friend of Jews, and who would do everything for us and that we should feel comfortable and we went to do there scientific work.

So, you went to Germany, you got your degree and then what?

Then we immigrated to America. But when we went to Germany, our plan was already that we wanted to come to America.

Was the Hungarian maid still with you, the nursemaid?

She did not come with us, she accompanied us to the border

But not to Israel?

No, she was actually a former nun, but when the Russians came into Hungary, they closed all the cloisters and she came to work with us and we are still in contact with her. Every Christmas we are sending her something and we write each other... and my husband was, it was so that my husband goes back to Hungary, but then he could not, so, at the end we did not meet, but we do send her presents, we remember and she writes us always, we send pictures.

Still? You're still in touch?

Yes, we are still in touch.

Now, when you came to the United States, you went to New York?

We went to New York and we worked at the Institute for Muscle Disease which was funded by the Muscular Dystrophy Association and we both worked in the field of muscle.

This institute was then closed down in '74. That was the time when we came to Chicago.

And what do you do here in Chicago?

Here we continued our research

Where?

At the University of Illinois, College of Medicine. And also teach. I teach medical students, dental students, graduate students, at one time I was also teaching pharmacy students and my husband was teaching medical students. He had to officially retire. Now he is a professor emeritus, but he is still teaching graduate students. He is still a professor. He was rehired. He is professor of the graduate college.

Now what about your sons? They followed in your footsteps?

We have two sons, while we were in New York, we lived very close to the institute where we worked and we often took the kids in, they learned really very easily, things in my lab and in my husband's lab and the love for science was instilled in them and they said that science is fun and they enjoyed working in the lab, they learned a lot. They both followed in our footsteps. My older son, after graduating high school, skipped college and went directly to graduate school, in a very special graduate school, the Rockefeller University, which was in New York City, not just was, but is in New York City. When the institute was closed down and my husband and I came to Chicago, then my youngest son came with us and he attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and he got his bachelor degree in science within two years. And then he went back to New York to Rockefeller University. Now Rockefeller University is a fantastic University. The students are very well treated. They get individual attention. The classes are very small and the labs, they often work with a full professor together side by side, they learn a lot.

You are very proud of your sons.

Oh, of course, did you ever see a Jewish mother who is not proud of her sons?

Both got PhD at a very early age. George was just 22 when he got his PhD.

Let me just ask you, thinking back, it has now been 50 years since the camp was liberated, what are your thoughts today, 50 years later, looking back on your life?

I had a very colorful life, I, when I got an award, the so-called Golden Apple award for teaching at the College of Medicine, I was asked to give a few remarks.

I said I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, my father was a famous physician but then I was taken to Auschwitz and then I survived the Hungarian revolution, but now I am a full professor. I have a loving husband, we work together, and we have two wonderful kids and now I even have three grandchildren.

So, in life you have good and bad; you have everything, and I try to concentrate on the good things.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

This is a picture of my mother. My mother is on the right hand side, standing. Next to her are her three brothers and in the front row from right to left is my grandfather, my aunt, my great grandmother, who was 96 years old when she was taken to Auschwitz, my grandmother, and my aunt.

Do you know what year it was taken?

I don't remember.

This is a picture of my father, my mother, my brother and me, I was 10 years old. This picture was taken at our house, in the garden of our house.

This is a picture of my mother, I was very close to my mother, I loved her and we were very good friends and she talked a lot to me when we were in Auschwitz and gave me advice, she said that if I am not with you, then always think about me if you have a question and you don't know what to do, then think what would I say. Many times, I was thinking what my mother would've said before I made a decision.

Here on the left hand side, I am with my two cousins. We were very close, good friends. We all were taken to Auschwitz. They did not survive.

What were their names?

Eva and Augie

This is my graduation picture. I graduated from the Jewish gymnasium which corresponds to the high school here in 1947.

This is our wedding picture in Budapest, 1949

This is my older son's wedding picture. From right to left it is George, Francis, my husband, Barbara, and me. The wedding was in March, 1986, here in Chicago.

This is the wedding picture of my youngest son, Francis. From right to left is George, Barbara, Francis, Rachel, I, my husband and in the front are our two grandchildren, Deborah and Michael

These are our grand children, Michael and Deborah. They are George and Barbara's. Now, they are 8 and 6 years old.

This is another grandchild. Her name is Isabelle. She is the daughter of Francis and Rachel. She was born in 1993, November.

Kate, this is your husband Michael. How long have you been married?

(Michael) 46 years.

Did you expect, when you got married back in Hungary, 46 years ago, that you would be in Chicago today? Did you feel you would be so celebrated in your fields?

No

Michael how do you feel about your wife? Is she a special person?

She is

Why? How?

She is a devoted wife, she is a very intelligent person, she is good mother. She is cultural, professional.

Kate, we're running out of time, tell me, is there anything else you want to say that would complete your story up to this point?

I think independent of how difficult your life has been, one should be optimistic and look always for the good in everything, in people, and in happenings.

And how has Michael helped you in attaining your goals, helping you to reach this day?

He was always very much supporting from day first when he gave me first date for my bleeding finger to this very moment. It is just wonderful that we understand each other so well and we can always discuss everything and we of course argue and discuss and then we always come to a conclusion. Whenever we meet other people, we usually have the same opinions and when we hear about something or read about something, we usually think alike and it is just wonderful that we are on the same wavelength. We not only love each other, but we also respect each other.

What are you proudest of in your life? Or several things you're proud of?

I think it is very important that I chose a good husband and I chose a profession which fulfills me. When I work I feel I have a meaningful work and I hope I am a good mother. I always thought about how to raise children, how to discipline them, how to educate them, how to have fun, how to be their best friend.

Have you talked to your children about your times in the camp?

Yes.

Did they ask many questions when they were little or later when they were grown?

Also when they were little and also later on.

Did they realize what the Holocaust was all about?

Yes.

Do you think you raised your children differently because your life was cut off at that point?

There are not control experiments here, so I don't like to speculate about things like this when there is no comparison and no control.